

JESUS DEFEATS THE DEVIL

Matthew 4:1-11

Key Verse: 4:4

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”””

In this passage the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil, three times consecutively. It was more difficult than having three consecutive final exams. Each time, Jesus answers with the word of God. Then the devil left Jesus and angels attended him. Jesus defeated the devil. This is good news for all mankind. We can share his victory when Jesus reigns as King in our hearts. Let’s accept Jesus today.

First, Jesus fights an epic battle in the desert (1-2).

Look at verse 1. “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” At Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit came down from heaven to dwell in Jesus. From that time on, Jesus lived by the Spirit. Life in the Spirit was not a continual emotional high. Rather, it was perpetual spiritual conflict. This was the beginning of a relentless campaign to destroy the devil’s work and advance the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is the king sent by God to conquer the world with the Spirit of God. The Spirit was eager to confront the devil and defeat him.

Since the Fall of man, God had been waiting for this moment. The devil had tempted the first woman Eve and led her to disobey the command of God. Through her, the devil had made the first man Adam stumble in disobedience. God’s

beautiful creation was ruined. Sin and death came into the world. Since then, the devil has roamed the world, seeming to do as he pleased. In Job 1:7, the devil, called Satan, seems to come uninvited to a meeting of God's holy angels. The Lord says to him, "Where have you come from?" It was a great rebuke, for it reminded Satan that he lost his position of authority when he abandoned God's mission (Jude 1:6). Satan answers, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Satan tried to make it sound like he was still really important. Although he lost his place in heaven, he still causes a lot of trouble on the earth.

In Ephesians 2:2b Paul calls him "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." The devil constantly seeks disobedient people. He invades their hearts and makes them do evil. He wants to them to grow in his image. Jesus called him a liar and a murderer (Jn 8:44). Anyone who comes under his power can become as evil as he is. Last week a woman in San Francisco threw her three children, ages 6, 3, and 1 into the bay. One is known dead, two are presumed dead. The woman claims that "voices" persuaded her to throw the children in. How can a mother throw her precious children into the bay? The devil is real. The devil is man's great enemy. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

We cannot understand the world properly without admitting the devil's existence. Revelation 12:9 says, "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." Many democratically minded people think that majority rule will produce justice and righteousness. But if the majority are

following the devil, they will make a wrong decision. This is why many of America's founding fathers insisted that democracy would work only when the majority had the fear of God and the word of God. For this reason, Benjamin Rush, one of the first great educators in American history, insisted that the Bible was the most important text book to be used in public schools. We cannot blindly trust the majority. We must also be on guard toward the news media. They often see things from the devil's point of view. During the recent Gulf Coast hurricane disaster, many Christian churches opened their doors and did tremendous relief work. But media reports focused on the shortcomings of FEMA. They have a hidden bias against the name of Jesus and his people. They are averse glorifying Jesus. Is this not the devil's influence? The devil exists. We must see the world with spiritual discernment.

When Jesus went into the desert to confront the devil, he knew very well the nature of the conflict that he would face. It was a spiritual battle, and it would be an epic battle that would determine the future destiny of mankind. The first man, Adam, failed to defeat the devil's temptation. Since then all men lived under the devil's power, and all manner of evil had come into the world. Jesus was coming as the new ancestor of the human race. Jesus came to defeat the devil and to give eternal victory to mankind. St. Paul saw Jesus as a second Adam and said in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22). To prepare for the battle to come, Jesus did something remarkable.

Look at verse 2. "After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." We cannot easily understand this fasting, for Jesus is different than any other human being. Repentant sinners fast to express their sorrow to God. But Jesus had no sin to repent. Those whose prayer life has become stale may fast as a means to

intensify prayer. But Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and had constant access to God. Then why did Jesus fast? It was to humble himself to the full measure as a man (Deut 8:2). It was to meet us where we are and to fight the battle on our behalf. It was to understand us. Jesus tasted the pain of hunger. Someone said, “A person does not know about life until he suffers from hunger.” In this way, Jesus shared in our humanity, becoming like us in every way. Because he understands us, he is merciful (Heb 2:17).

Second, “man does not live on bread alone” (3-4).

Look at verse 3. “The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’” The tempter is, of course, the devil, or Satan (10). Let’s think about this temptation in two parts. In the first place, the devil tempted Jesus to doubt what God had said about him. God had just said about Jesus, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” Jesus had a clear identity in God as the Son of God. He knew his life was most precious and he could be happy about himself. But the devil used the word “if” to plant doubt about what God had said to Jesus. In this way, the devil wanted to provoke Jesus to prove himself. To some extent, we can understand. God says to us, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood...” (1 Pe 2:9). We are happy to hear these words. We feel God’s love and the absolute meaning and value of our lives. We want to work hard for the glory of God. But then the devil comes and says, “If you are a chosen person, why do you do this? Or why didn’t you do that?” Then we can doubt what God said about us. We can be confused and helpless.

In the second place, the devil tempted Jesus to use his divine power to turn stones into bread. Jesus could do so. But it would be a great mistake. It would be reacting

to the devil's word. The devil implies that Jesus must eat bread to survive, and that to get bread, Jesus should use any available means. With this temptation, the devil has blinded the minds of men to seek only bread. The psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) developed a famous hierarchy of needs. He thought that man's physiological needs were most important. In other words, man must have air, water and food as a first priority. It sounds reasonable. But it was precisely the devil's idea. Though his name was Abraham, he did not have the faith of Abraham.

These days the American education system tends to emphasize the development of skills and techniques rather than the edification of humanity. It is because many see getting a good job and making money as the goal of education. They are living under the devil's temptation. Many young people think it is most important to study hard, get good grades and then a high-paying job. They think all their problems will be solved with money. One young man studied computer science at UIC. At the same time, he liked Genesis Bible study. But whenever he came to Bible study he had a nagging feeling that he was wasting time that should be used for school study. So he quit Genesis study half way through. He graduated with honors and got a high-paying job in the Sears Tower. He had everything he had wanted. According to his theory that money buys happiness, he should have been happy. But he was miserable. To keep his job, he had to work overtime at the whim of his boss, including nights and weekends. The money in his bank account did not give him peace. Rather, he worried constantly whether he was getting the best return on his investments, or if he might suddenly lose it all. Anxiety made him look 40 years old, though he was only 24.

How did Jesus respond to the devil? Look at verse 4. "Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the

mouth of God.”” It is significant that Jesus answered. Jesus was not surprised and caught off guard. Jesus was ready for the devil’s attack. Jesus had the word of God in his heart which applied to the devil’s temptation. Jesus’ answer comes from Deuteronomy 8. In that chapter, God explains why he tested the Israelites. By meditating on that passage, Jesus discovered God’s purpose for testing him. So Jesus could pass the test. We can learn from Jesus that the time of trial and testing is the time to study God’s word deeply.

Look at verse 4 again. “Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.””” Jesus’ answer was a direct quote from the word of God. Jesus did not add anything to it or subtract anything from it. Jesus quoted it as it was. But Jesus was not merely reciting something he had memorized. Jesus knew the spiritual meaning of the words. Jesus trusted God’s words as the absolute truth. Jesus trusted God’s words as the best expression of God’s love.

Let’s think about Jesus’ answer in two parts. First of all Jesus said, “Man does not live on bread alone.” Jesus did not say, “I,” but “Man.” Jesus was answering the devil as a representative of all mankind. Jesus restored the dignity and value of man. Man is not just a physical being who lives by physical bread, like the animals. Man is made in the image of God with a body and a soul. Man’s life does not depend on a piece of bread or a Big Mac. Man is also a spiritual being.

Secondly Jesus said, “but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” As a spiritual being, man needs spiritual nurture. This comes from the word of God. The word of God is living (Heb 4:12). The word of God gives life (Jn 6:63). When a man has the word of God, his soul lacks nothing. He is content and happy,

regardless of his physical condition or outward circumstances. Jesus was fully satisfied with God in his soul. Jesus was happy to suffer being tempted in the desert, for it fulfilled the word of God. Jesus did not enjoy only a few favorite Bible verses. Jesus lived by “every word” that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus won the victory over the devil’s temptation to live for bread. Jesus wants us to share his victory. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” We do not have to live as slaves of bread, money or employers. We do not have to study for the sake of making money for our future security. We are God’s precious children. Our first priority is to seek God and his kingdom. When we do, God will satisfy our souls and provide for all our needs.

Third, trust God; don’t test God (5-7).

Look at verses 5-6. “Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”’” The devil is pretty smart. He learned from the first encounter that Jesus trusted God and his word absolutely. So when he came back the second time, he tried to make use of this by manipulating Jesus’ trust in God’s word. The devil quoted a Bible verse promising God’s protection, and then urged Jesus to jump from the highest point of the temple to prove it. We can learn here that knowing the word of God is not everything. The devil knows the word of God. But his motive in using it is to deceive and destroy.

Look at verse 7. “Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.””” Jesus’ answer reveals the nature of this temptation. It was to put God to the test. The Spirit had led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. In essence, God was testing Jesus. Jesus should submit to God’s test humbly. But the devil wanted Jesus to test God instead of being tested by God. Jesus quoted the word of God, saying, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” We must trust God and his word of promise; we must not test God.

As we know very well, trusting God’s word of promise requires perseverance. We must patiently wait for him to do his work. Sometimes we feel that not much is happening in our ministry. At such times, we may be tempted to try to do something fantastic to show that God is working. Some missionaries and shepherds think that their lives of mission will be validated by visible fruits; so they push for this prematurely. However, in many cases, fruits do not appear because God is testing us. During such times, we must resist the temptation to test God, and rather, we must be tested by God until we can pass. When we pass, God will pour his blessing on us. James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”

Fourth, “worship the Lord your God and serve him only” (8-11).

Look at verses 8-9. “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’” Here we see what the devil was really after. He wanted the worship of Jesus, the Son of God. The devil always wants to steal the worship that belongs to God and direct it to himself. This time he

appealed to Jesus' purpose in coming to this world. Jesus came to claim the kingdoms of the world for God. To do this, Jesus would have to go to the cross and shed his blood to purchase men for God. It was a painful and difficult way prescribed by God. The devil wanted to strike a bargain with Jesus that would make things easier. If Jesus worshiped him just once, the devil would hand over the kingdom without a fight. The devil was lying. But it was a temptation to avoid the cross by compromise.

Look at verse 10. "Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."'" Jesus rejected the compromise. Jesus rejected the easy way. Jesus chose to go the way of the cross which God had given him. It was Jesus' surrender to God in true worship. Jesus would worship God and God alone. To do so, Jesus had to offer himself unblemished to God as the ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world.

In our society, there are so many who have compromised their worship of God, and end up worshipping the devil. They attend church for an hour on Sunday and put one dollar in the basket. But as soon as they leave the church building, they forget the message they just heard and give their whole hearts to what they really want to do. They can spend many hours yelling and screaming for their favorite sports teams. They are willing to pay hundreds, even thousands of dollars to attend games or to buy paraphernalia. From God's point of view, who are they really worshipping? Some people idolize other people, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend. They are willing to spend tremendous amounts of time and money to win that person's heart. What they are really seeking is to satisfy their vanity or lustful desire. In fact, they are giving their real worship to the devil. Those who worship the devil have heartbreak and tragedy awaiting them.

Jesus said, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Jesus can set us free from the devil’s trap. Jesus can enable us to serve God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength. This is real worship. When we worship God in this way, our cross turns to glory, joy and victory.

Look at verse 11. “Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.” The devil could not stand any longer before Jesus. The devil had to leave defeated. Angels, who had been watching from heaven, came down and ministered to the victorious King Jesus. This victory began in the desert. At first it was known only to heavenly creatures. But the kingdom of heaven would spread to the whole world. Now whoever accepts Jesus as King has victory over the devil. Let’s remember Jesus’ word, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”